Volume IV., Number 23. Week of December 13, 1943

*New York*

# THEATRE CRITICS'

*Reviews*

# 1943

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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 13, 1943.

†*"The World's Full of Girls" opened Monday, December 6th, at the Royale Theatre.*

†*"The Voice of the Turtle" opened Wednesday, December 8th, at the Morosco Theatre.*

†*"Pillar to Post" opened Friday, December 10th, at the Playhouse Theatre.*


**THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS**

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN


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# "Pillar to Post"

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***December 11, 1943***

## *Delayed Fizzle*

**By HOWARD BARNES**

THE last-minute revisions which have held up the opening of "Pillar to Post" may have improved the original show, but not sufficiently to keep one from wondering why the postponements were not made permanent. For all its breezy direction and emphatic acting, this Rose Simon Kohn comedy has a leaden ring as it is plunked down on the stage of the Playhouse. The author has decorated a series of romantic misadventures with uniforms. She has tried hard to be sly and witty. The net result of her writing and re-writing is an obvious and labored piece that goes through the motions of a three-act drama with no more than an occasional spark of entertainment.

* * *

There are a lot of contemporary come-ons in the production. It touches on the housing difficulties which obtain around a large Louisiana army camp. It celebrates the plight of a native girl, who unwittingly finds herself posing as the bride of a lieutenant. Moreover, it attempts to give one an insight into the existence of those Army wives who are forced to follow the directions of the title. There was room for lusty characterization in the material. There was opportunity for engaging situations to develop. The truth is that the figures of the comedy are as two-dimensional as the scenes. They are not even granted funny lines.

The best that can be said for "Pillar to Post" is that it has been painstakingly put on. Brock Pemberton has given the work every break, including the postponements. Antoinette Perry has staged it with pace and a full exploitation of its random moments of laughter. That these are few and far between is no fault of the physical production. No amount of trappings, including the John Root settings, could have stifled the inherent yawns in the new Playhouse exhibit. The author may have had a comical idea to begin with, but she has not demonstrated it in her final work.

* * *

The players do what is required of them valiantly, slipping on some of the new lines, but contriving to give the play a slight feel of honest theatrical currency. Carl Gose is admirably restrained as a nice officer, who gets in a jam through a generous gesture. Perry Wilson is all right as the girl who pretends to be married and then decides that she likes the idea enough to make it legal. Franklyn Fox gives an explosive portrait of a colonel and the others dash in and out of the proceedings with professional skill, if little appearance that they know what they are all about. "Pillar to Post" has had all sorts of artful ministrations, but no amount of them, I think, would have kept it from being a bore.

### 'PILLAR TO POST'

A comedy by Rose Simon Kohn. Presented by Brock Pemberton at the Playhouse, December 10, 1943. Directed by Antoinette Perry. Settings by John Root. The cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| Mrs. Bromley | Ruth Gates |
| Sgt. Jackson | Paul Kirk Giles |
| Private Corliss | Alfred Porter |
| Miss Dawson | Jean Mann |
| Frances Bass | Elaine Perry |
| Private Pearl Hart | Susana Garnett |
| Jean Howard | Perry Wilson |
| "Pudge" Corliss | Lorraine Pressler |
| Private Dixon | Bob King |
| Vera Marsh | Judith Cargill |
| Private Peters | Henry Michaels |
| Lt. Don Mallory | Carl Gose |
| Mrs. Harley | Agnes Scott Yost |
| Hattie Beekman | Margaret Power |
| Private Curley Hart | Guy Gillette |
| Alabama | Hamtree Harrington |
| Capt. Jack Ross | Richard Hart |
| Col. Michael Otley | Franklyn Fox |
| Mrs. Kate Otley | Frances Woodbury |
| Milly Ross | Elsie Hanover |
| Lt. Thompkins | Lee Parry |
| Dotty Thompkins | Frances McCabe |
| Sgt. Tommy Withers | Kip Good |
| Mrs. Mallory | Suzanne Jackson |
| Sgt. Jones | William Christal |
| Cab Driver | Robert Clark |

**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**
***December 11, 1943***

## *She Had No Place to Sleep So She Took Up With a Soldier*

**By BURNS MANTLE**

JOHN CHAPMAN having reluctantly selected this week-end for his flu, your report from the Broadway front this morning comes from what is known in army circles as a veteran correspondent.

The Play is "Pillar to Post," by Rose Simon Kohn, and the news of it is that it is the latest of the comedies motivated by the prevailing bed shortage. Nor does it promise to be the last. Brock Pemberton produced it last night at the Playhouse. Whether it was Al Woods and the older bedroom farces which originated the idea, or "The Doughgirls," which stimulated it, the bedded-heroine theme continues to grow in popularity.

Even this early in the season we have had it treated seriously in "Those Endearing Young Charms" and lightly in "The Voice of the Turtle," with various gradations between.

"Pillar to Post" takes a farcical slant at the situation and fails to come off, largely because there is little truth in it, and nothing for a normal or healthy imagination to work on.

### Artificial Theatre

It is artificial theatre from pillar to post, and artificial theatre can kill a comedy quicker than either actors or directors can revive it.

This comedy's plausible beginning is staged in the anteroom of a USO Housing Bureau. The room is crowded with tired and eager applicants seeking some place to lay their heads, and ease their carcasses. From there it moves to a modern Auto Court.

Jean Howard, young and attractive cosmetic saleswoman, has attached herself to Lieut. Don Mallory, who had a night's leave and hoped to enjoy it. At the Auto Court they are, if you can believe it, mistaken for husband and wife and forced by a series of trick situations to spend the night in the same bungalow.

The Lieutenant takes to his bed roll and sleeps on the floor, while Jean rebelliously tosses about on the bed. Complications that pile up next act help gradually to adjust both their urges and their relations.

### Unhappy Cast

It seems to me that the players were not too carefully chosen for their particular roles, but it is difficult to say. They are given small chance to prove whether they were or not.

The heroine is introduced as an unattractive, spitfirish type, and the hero as a handsome but dull army fellow. There is a blustering colonel plainly overwritten and somewhat overplayed and groups of modish army folk right out of the catalogues rather than off the reservation.

Perry Wilson, who has done other parts much better, is the girl and Carl Gose, who also has a short but worthy record, is the boy. Franklyn Fox bullies the colonel, Frances Woodbury is a pleasant foil as his missus.

Hamtree Harrington talks his way out of the comedy possibilities. Ruth Gates and Kip Good have nice bits.

The handsome sets are by John Root. Antoinette Perry directed and Warner Brothers are co-partners. "Pillar to Post" will be different on the screen.

**NEW YORK TIMES**
***December 11, 1943***

## *The 4F Drama*

**By LEWIS NICHOLS**

AFTER surging into the light for a time, the local theatre last evening crept back guiltily into its melancholy ways when Brock Pemberton produced "Pillar to Post" at the Playhouse. A story of camp life and Army wives, it is neither well written nor well acted, presenting the gloomy picture of a comedy which wanders with leaden feet across the stage. The Army wives one day will have a play of their own, they even will have a comedy, but this one certainly is not it.

"Pillar to Post" is a bedroom farce brought up to date by the addition of uniforms. There is the girl who is trying to find some place to spend the night and persuades the nice young man to loan her his name, nothing more. There is the commanding officer who assumes his lieutenant has taken unto himself a bride. There is the double bed, though the nice young man doesn't sleep in it. There are jokes which can be taken two ways or, what is perhaps wiser, ignored. There is no surprise whatsoever, for at the end love has entered into the case, along with an appointment to Washington. In setting all of it down, Rose Simon Kohn, the author, has missed none of the old situations, and beyond a funny line or two she has added nothing to them.

The acting, too, has left things about as they were. Perry Wilson, as the girl, would have to be half a dozen persons at once to play the role, and being only one she can but do her best. Carl Gose is the lieutenant who gets into trouble and acts it as though he were about to wring his hands—as well he might. The roaring colonel is played by Franklyn Fox, who has the voice for it, and the colonel's wife is Frances Woodbury. Hamtree Harrington, as the handyman of the auto camp where it all takes place, gives a genial performance which shows that, while he knows it all has happened before he, at least, is having a good time. Antoinette Perry directed and perhaps the best part of the evening is the setting by John Root.

# "Pillar to Post"

**NEW YORK POST**
***December 11, 1943***

## *"Pillar to Post" a Comedy of Army Men and Their Wives*

**By WILELLA WALDORF**

ROSE SIMON KOHN is a playwright unknown to this department, but after seeing her comedy, "Pillar to Post," last night at the Playhouse, we should say that she is probably the wife of an Army officer. Finding life a bit dull at the post, where the main occupations are "polishing the brass" and "polishing the apple," she just sat down one day and wrote a play. It must have been lots of fun and no doubt she had hopes of seeing it produced some evening at the Officers' Club.

But these are stirring times. Everything is highly unpredictable. "Pillar to Post" turned up on Broadway last night under the management of Brock Pemberton, with Antoinette Perry directing and a reasonably large company of actors trying to pretend they were involved in something rather special.

There is nothing shameful or offensive about "Pillar to Post." It is a harmless, naive, clumsy little play that has happened to stop off here on its way to Hollywood. Mr. Pemberton is now financially backed by the Brothers Warner of that city and they will doubtless make a nice Grade B picture out of it.

### The Housing Situation

Theatregoers who remember when Brock Pemberton's name on a production used to mean something highly competent—even, on occasion, provocative—are pretty sure to feel let down by "Pillar to Post." Not only is the script a bit amateurish. The production is often slipshod and uncertain.

There's a boom on in the theatres just now and Mr. Pemberton, not to mention the Brothers Warner, apparently feel that anything reasonably amusing, with a gentle love story, is sure to get an audience. No doubt they are right.

The housing situation around big Army posts, it seems, is far worse than it is in Washington, D. C. Finding a bed to sleep in is a feat, and some high ranking officers, whose wives follow them from camp to camp, are forced to take refuge in such places as the Colonial Auto Court.

When Jean Howard is stranded between trains and can't find a place to sleep, she gets a handsome young lieutenant who is kind to old ladies, and therefore harmless, to drive her to the Court, where the author manages, not very adroitly, to have them pretend to be married. And who should be living across the way but Colonel Otley.

Anybody who can't go on from here has never seen a play before and will be enchanted with "Pillar to Post."

Carl Gose as the lieutenant and Miss Perry Wilson as the girl are as romantic as possible under the circumstances, and there is an explosive performance of the old puff-and-splutter school by Franklyn Fox as the colonel. Hamtree Harrington, the Negro comedian, makes something of a routine part as the Colonial Auto Court's man-of-all-work, and there are helpful bits by Suzanne Jackson, Kip Good and Elsie Hanover, who has a droll manner and a voice like a fog-horn.

There would seem to be material for a good play in Army wives, but it will take a better playwright than Miss Kohn to write it.

**NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM**
***December 11, 1943***

## *Comedy Deals with Army Housing*

**By BURTON RASCOE**

PILLAR TO POST, by Rose Simon Kohn, which opened after some hesitation at the Playhouse last night, is a pleasant, rather instructive, but, on the whole, draggy, unconvincing and unexciting comedy of etiquette among the married set amidst the haphazard housing conditions that have prevailed for army wives at some of the large army camps.

It is so nice a try that I, for one, wish that something could happen to it to give it spark and validity before the public gives it what I fear will be a quick brush-off. It needs more comedy and faster pace; but, more importantly, it needs something to give credence to the interrelations of the two principal characters, enacted by Perry Wilson and Carl Gose, during the second and third acts.

To be blunt about it, Miss Wilson, except for her opening scene, is unfortunately cast and badly directed. When she is first discovered as a haggard and wretched cosmetic drummer, without sleep for four days in an army camp town, where accommodations, if any, are for army wives and where women civilian transients are simply out of luck, she is appealing and promising in her desperate expedient to get lodging for the night. But, through the next two acts, she is required to be petulant, stupid, unreasonable, self-centered and utterly unlovable, and yet Mr. Gose, as an unhappy young lieutenant, caught with a silly termagant on his hands after he had been gallant enough to do her a favor, is supposed to find his love for her awakened. It just doesn't down.

You see, in her extremity, Miss Perry, after seeing the kind young lieutenant being solicitous of the welfare of an old lady at the USO headquarters, asks him to drive her to an auto camp five miles out and register him and her as man and wife—just for the night—because cottages at the camp are available only to army married couples. She just wants to get some sleep.

But after he has done his good deed for the night and is about to leave he discovers that the adjoining cottage is that of his commanding officer and, in three minutes by the clock, he is in a mess whereby he must invent the story for the benefit of the colonel and his wife and for a bevy of officers and their wives that he has just been married or else risk court-martial, on the eve of his promotion, for illegally registering what appears to be a loose woman in the very bosom of the colonel's family.

### Act Out Pretense

The next five scenes are taken up with the acting out of the pretense, and with the efforts of the two to get shed of each other. But the colonel, a domineering old codger, who considers it is his special province to straighten out the marital difficulties of his men, acts as a mediator when the young couple stage a fake quarrel and the "bride" loudly declares she is leaving after their first night together. Other sentimentalists among the officers' wives treat the "quarrel" as proof of love and thus bog down the plans of the two. The C. O., indeed, bestows upon the lieutenant and his "bride" the accolade of inviting them to his one-room "home" for dinner. Love ripens unexpectedly and, unconvincingly, in this melee of duplicity.

There is a large cast, most of whom are dispensed with after the opening scene—a fairly amusing one—and the burden is carried by Miss Wilson, Mr. Gose, Franklyn Fox and Frances Woodbury, the latter being especially good as the colonel's wife. Susana Garnett highlights the opening scene with a brief bit. There should be a good play in the scene of this one. Unfortunately this isn't it.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN**
***December 11, 1943***

## *Twice-Delayed Comedy Arrives Under Brock Pemberton Aegis*

**By ROBERT GARLAND**

THE play which, after two postponements, Brock Pemberton brought last night into the Playhouse, gets a bit better as it goes along. But even if it does, "Pillar to Post" is seldom as light or as laughable as it sets out to be. A newcomer among the playwrights, as far as this department knows I'm afraid Rose Simon Kohn is not as dexterous a dramatist as are those to whom Producer Pemberton is accustomed.

Not that "Pillar to Post" doesn't have its moments. It does! But these moments are none too frequent. And, as often as not, they are beside the play. The little scene between the lieutenant and the make-up box, for instance. And a couple more. If I could only remember them.

Thinking over last night's disappointment, I'm always disappointed when Brock Pemberton, he of "Miss Lulu Bett," "Enter Madame" and "Strictly Dishonorable" and the others, doesn't have a smash hit on his hands—I wouldn't be surprised if the fault is to be found in the comedy's phony premise, a contrived complication which, during the entire first act, would be straightened out by one sensible explanation on the part of Lt. Mallory.

### She Gets Her Man

Having been a shave-tail once myself, it is in me to believe that even SECOND lieutenants aren't quite as easily hoodwinked, put-upon and generally made a fool of as is Second Lieutenant Donald Mallory at the Playhouse. By his Top Sergeant, maybe—and this is not a misprint! But certainly not by a strange and none-too-eye-filling female of the species from the great Middle Western spaces.

But, that's exactly what DOES happen to Second Lieutenant Mallory. It happens no sooner than Jean Howard lays her eyes on him. Jean, a roaming saleswoman for her father's cosmetic factory, makes of him a liar, a hypocrite and almost a civilian with an Army discharge marked "dishonorable."

All of which Second Lieutenant Mallory could have avoided in the beginning by simply opening his mouth and speaking a few audible and well-chosen words. But, in 48th Street, he doesn't! As a matter of regretful report, he doesn't even have the courage of Sergeant Bill Page around at the Morosco, who hangs his coat on the bedroom chair without benefit of clergy . . . Yes, Jean finally gets her man and all is honorable!

### Author Doubtful

The part of the heroine, the traveling Elizabeth Arden, the trouble-making Helena Rubinstein, is taken by Perry Wilson, a graduate of stock companies, radio and the Ex-Experimental Theatre, who starts out on the wrong foot as the bride-to-be of Second Lieutenant Mallory. When the powder-and-lotion lady most needs your best wishes, she does her best not to win them.

Carl Gose, as Second Lieutenant Mallory, brings charm and manliness to a role which, as written, most certainly calls for them. The lieutenant admits to having been around a bit, but the playwright doesn't actually believe it. As his Colonel remarks, he really should be taught the facts of life.

To my way of thinking, the outstanding performers at the Playhouse are Franklyn Fox, as our second lieutenant's blustering colonel; Frances Woodbury, as the blustering colonel's bustling lady, and Hamtree Harrington who, since I first saw him in "Blackbirds," has never let down a characterization . . . It has long been my belief that you must, of a necessity, believe in the premise on which a farce or a comedy is founded . . .

You just can't take stock in "Pillar to Post's" first-act foundation. It's a pity! But it's true.

# "Pillar to Post"

**NEW YORK SUN**
***December 11, 1943***

## 'Pillar to Post,' New Comedy, Presented at the Playhouse by Brock Pemberton

**By HERRICK BROWN**

FINALLY taking the leap after two postponements, Rose Simon Kohn's comedy, "Pillar to Post," landed on the stage of the Playhouse last evening under the aegis of Brock Pemberton and turned out to be a slight little play with just enough good fun in it to make one wish that it were all as amusing as in its best moments.

Miss Kohn, in this her first Broadway play, has hit upon a good idea and a timely one, in the amusing complications inherent in the crowded conditions in towns near our Army camps today, where even officers are thankful to find most any sort of a place to house their wives. Unfortunately, however, she hasn't displayed much originality in carrying out her theme, being willing to settle for a more or less routine retelling of the old, old story, of the couple who are supposed to be married, but aren't; with plenty of the ancient wheezes about brides and bridegrooms thrown in.

Into the milling throng in a crowded U.S.O. housing bureau comes Jean Howard, seeking a place to lay her weary head for the night. She's on the road selling cosmetics for her dad's firm, and she quickly finds that harried U.S.O. volunteers aren't greatly interested in any problems but those of the soldiers from a nearby camp and their wives and sweethearts. Enter at that moment an obliging and good looking young lieutenant, carrying a bag for a nice old lady; give the girl the idea of having him pose as her husband just long enough to help her rent a cabin in a nearby auto camp; get him to fall for it, with perfectly honorable intentions, you understand, and Miss Kohn's play is rolling.

Of course, as always happens in comedies like this one, the cabin turns out to be right next to that occupied by the colonel of the lieutenant's outfit and the young couple promptly run smack into the senior officer himself. A lie about a sudden marriage has to be told to cover the situation, and like most lies, it leads to a lot more before the final curtain falls. Of course, a little truth telling early in the proceedings might have straightened everything out, but then Miss Kohn wouldn't have had any play left.

There is an up-to-the-minute freshness in "Pillar to Post" that is engaging; its people are likeable, even if their actions are not always plausible, and there are some amusing scenes, particularly the one where the colonel and his wife have the supposed bride and groom to dinner, and the colonel demonstrates how he used to lead cheers at West Point. The play as a whole never quite comes off, however, and even as skillful a director as Antoinette Perry can't hide its amateurish features, nor completely erase the atmosphere of something played in a high school auditorium.

John Root has contrived a neat set to let the audience see what is going on both inside the cabin and out.

Perry Wilson is the girl who found out that a lie like a snowball can grow, and she makes an attractive and appealing damsel in distress. Carl Gose has a little more trouble with the part of the lieutenant in a jam, and the play would have been more effective if he had been a little more sure in his playing. Franklyn Fox is properly blustering as the colonel and Frances Woodbury is excellent, too, as his wife, who knows just how to handle him. Hamtree Harrington contributes some amusing moments as a dusky and worldly wise man of all work at the auto camp, and Kip Good turns in one of the best performances of the evening as a sergeant from the girl's home town.

"Pillar to Post" is reported headed eventually for Hollywood. It will probably wind up there as a Class B film. Put it down in the same class on Broadway.

**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
***December 12, 1943***

## It's Billed As a Comedy

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

WELL, back to the salt mines again. At any rate, that gay interlude of *Carmen Jones* and *The Voice of the Turtle* was fun while it lasted. And now, like some dreadful morning after, some terrible day of reckoning, comes *Pillar to Post*, truly one of the most lamentable of offerings.

To begin with, it's one of those comedy plots you've often met before, but are perfectly right to accept an introduction to no matter how many times you meet it. It's the one about the fellow and the girl who, for reasons not worth going into, have to pretend that they are married. This time the pretense goes on in an army camp, between a very proper young lady and a very proper young lieutenant. There they are, chaste by night and chastened by day, in one smal' room. Right next door lives the lieutenant's bad-tempered C.O., and at all hours everybody in uniform and everybody in uniform's wife drops in. Everybody who drops in seems dopey as hell, but I guess even so it's a pretty ticklish situation. The young couple certainly have to do a lot of quick thinking. In the end . . well, that goes without saying.

That's the plot, and I'm afraid that the dialogue is immeasurably worse. To discuss the acting and direction would only be more bad news, and I imagine you've had enough.

# "The Voice of the Turtle"

**NEW YORK TIMES**
***December 9, 1943***

## THE PLAY IN REVIEW

## *"The Voice of the Turtle"*

**By LEWIS NICHOLS**

TO waste no time with dismal qualifications inspired by a Broadway winter, "The Voice of the Turtle" is the most delightful comedy of the season—and probably back a year or two as well. For John van Druten, who is happiest when his characters are few in number, has built his latest play around three of the best of them, and Margaret Sullavan, Audrey Christie and Elliott Nugent play the parts as though they were living them. "The Voice of the Turtle" has everything it needs, save that possibly it is two or three hours too short, for last night's audience, at least, would have sat there quite cheerfully until this minute, and afterwood would have helped the cleaning women get ready for today.

• • •

As an exhibition of how to construct a play to amuse the world, Mr. van Druten's is very little this side of classic. His cast of three at no time seems small; probably if only one of them stayed on the stage, that would appear quite in order. For their conversation sparkles with wit, and it has the friendly grin of a high good humor. Since he is not writing a farce, the author also has given his play a quality of great tenderness. The conversation runs from love, to the Army, to food, to the theatre, and Mr. van Druten and his players have the right thing to say about all of them. Probably he has been listening to the conversation at the next table, and in the subway and the wings, for it all is very human.

The title is biblical, noting that when the turtle's voice is heard spring is upon the world—even to an apartment in the East Sixties, near Third. The apartment is Sally Middleton's, and she is an actress of smallish parts who is trying to get over a love affair with a producer. Her friend brings an Army sergeant to the apartment, and then, with a chance for a better date, leaves him there. He stays for the week-end. He wishes to have no sentiment about such things, nor does she—but the voice of the turtle carries quite an echo, which Mr. van Druten, among others, is not one to ignore.

• • •

The cast is perfect, of course. Miss Sullavan plays the role of the actress with a charm that is second to none. Her Sally Middleton is composed of a young girl, an actress who hopes some day she will get a leading part, a girl who likes to be busy around the house and whose Joplin (Mo.) upbringing makes her faintly worried about her life. Mr. Nugent is a calm sergeant on leave who has been around. He is practical and recognizes Sally's moods—and he gives a whale of a performance. The third member, Miss Christie, is on the stage for only parts of two acts, Mr. van Druten no doubt feeling three persons clutter up plays, but she is very good while there. Her role is of a cynical girl, harsh and brassy, more the type of a stock play character than are the other two.

Having written it, the author knew what he wanted when he came to direct, and he has done an excellent job. Two or three character plays can get rather static, but not this one. There is enough unforced movement to cover the spots between brilliant lines, and those spots are few. Stewart Chaney has fallen into the spirit of the occasion by constructing a splendid set showing a bedroom, sitting room and kitchen, all apparently of normal size, perfectly appointed. The cast could live there if the worst came to the worst, although it is not likely to. For "The Voice of the Turtle" will be heard in the spring on Broadway also.

### 'THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE'

A comedy by John van Druten. Presented by Alfred de Liagre, Jr. at the Morosco Theater December 8, 1943. Staged by Mr. van Druten. Setting by Stewart Chaney. The cast:

Sally Middleton.....Margaret Sullavan
Olive Lashbrooke.....Audrey Christie
Bill Page.....Elliott Nugent

# "The Voice of the Turtle"

**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**
***December 9, 1943***

## *Three Actors, One Playwright Are All That a New Hit Needs*

**By JOHN CHAPMAN**

THE news from this corner this morning is cheerful—heartingly cheerful. The first wholly satisfying, completely captivating comedy of the new season, "The Voice of the Turtle," arrived last night at the Morosco.

It is so good that one doesn't remember until afterward that it is, in addition to being a funny and heartwarming evening in the theatre, a playwright's tour de force—a comedy with only three characters . . . and one of these three makes but two relatively brief appearances. The plot is nothing to write about at length, because its simple concern is a boy and a girl falling in love. The lines are nothing to write about, either, for they are not gags; their humor stems from character and situation, and they are the play itself.

John van Druten, the author, has done his most facile work in writing "The Voice of the Turtle" and an equally deft job in directing it. Most fortunately for all of us, Producer Alfred de Liagre, Jr. found Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and Audrey Christie for the three roles.

### Miss Sullavan Just Right

Miss Sullavan, returning from Hollywood for the first time since "Stage Door" won her a screen job, is proof that Hollywood can't be such a bad place after all—for she gives a thoroughly right performance of a girl falling in love. She is pretty, of course, and as an actress she is resourceful. All the men in last night's audience must have fallen for her Sally Middleton as hard as Sergt. Bill Page (Mr. Nugent) did.

Mr. Nugent, who does practically everything in either films or theatre, returns from a couple of screen directing jobs to match Miss Sullavan's performance. And Miss Christie, whose comedy is admirably written and played for contrast, completes the trio. Mr. van Druten's three-character piece has three more characters in it than do several of Broadway's more populous offerings.

The title of this sentimental hit is derived from the same source from which Lillian Hellman got her harsh and embittered "The Little Foxes"—the biblical Song of Solomon. The line goes, "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

Well, it's Spring and Miss Christie is visiting Miss Sullavan in her three-room apartment (a very workable and good-looking job by Stewart Chaney). They are actresses—Miss Sullavan an eager, young one with no experience except in flops; Miss Christie an older and more battered one, with considerable experience in both theatrical and non-theatrical flops.

Right now Miss Christie is anticipating a comfortable weekend with a sergeant on furlough, with whom she has had intimacies now and then. But by the time the lad has shown up she has had a bid from an older and hotter flame, a navy man; so she dumps her sergeant on Miss Sullavan.

That's about all there is to it. They—Mr. Nugent and Miss Sullavan—get acquainted, and the more they became acquainted the better they like each other. She has an inquisitive, whimsical mind and he has quiet humor and gentle understanding. He spends the weekend in the apartment—on the living room daybed the first night. Before the end, of course, the girls have to have a set-to about whose man the sergeant is, and it is delightfully human and funny.

The whole job—writing, casting, directing, acting, setting and picking pretty things for Miss Sullavan to wear—is smart without being smarty, expert without being tricky. It is very welcome.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN**
***December 9, 1943***

## *Sullavan, Nugent and Christie at Morosco in van Druten Comedy*

**By ROBERT GARLAND**

CHARMING'S the word. Charming!

"Charming," said Noel Coward, sitting two rows behind me, "nobody but Johnnie van Druten could have done it." "Charming," said Edna Ferber, sitting next to me, "this is the season's perfect comedy." "Charming," said Gilbert Miller, sitting across the aisle from me, "high comedy has seldom been higher." "Charming," said George S. Kauffman, talking to Edna Ferber, "the season now has a comedy about which to cheer."

Sitting pivotally, and duly impressed, in the center of all these internationally important somebodies, I could manage no more than a meekly murmured "Charming" in easy echo of their understandable enthusiasm last night in the beautifully redecorated Morosco Theatre. To my way of thinking, "The Voice of the Turtle" IS charming. And, by way of criticism, it's a good deal more than that.

In this three character play—and, personally, I'm more than a bit resentful because, along with Margaret Sullavan and Elliott Nugent, the likeness of Audrey Christie, the sole member of the "supporting cast," does not appear on the covers of the programs at the Morosco—John van Druten has given us the outstanding comedy of the season. It's a lively and literate masterpiece that has everything to recommend it.

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### Sigh for the Sergeant

By "everything," I mean everything.

As written by John van Druten, "The Voice of the Turtle" is a well-nigh perfect play. As staged by Mr. van Druten, "The Voice of the Turtle" is a well-nigh perfect bit of staging. As produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., "The Voice of the Turtle" is a well-nigh perfect piece of producing. And, as acted by Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and the Audrey Christie whose likeness isn't on the program, it is a well-nigh perfect evening of acting.

The story is that of a triangular trio made up of two women and—God help him, even after he has won Margaret Sullavan—one man. The man is a soldier. A sergeant, even! He has dated up Audrey Christie, who, having got hold of a higher ranking gentleman-in-uniform, turns him over to the Margaret Sullavan whose likeness is, and should be, on the programs. Margaret makes a go of it. Audrey doesn't.

So, having failed to shine her officer shoulder-pins as she had hoped to, Audrey comes back to reclaim her Elliott Nugent. But he, under the on-stage name of Bill Page, has fallen in love with Margaret. Having tried things out and found them both marriageable and pleasant, Bill and Margaret have made up each other's minds to evolve a marriage of it. So Audrey, a nice girl without her picture on the programs, is sunk!

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### Brilliant Comedy

If this sounds thin and inconsequential, it isn't! For three acts and six scenes, John van Druten keeps "The Voice of the Turtle" laughable and alive. High comedy at its highest, you have to pinch yourself to remember that this is a three-character, three-act, one-set play that never lets your interest droop for a single second. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, a three character play is a trick play. This one isn't!

"The Voice of the Turtle" is a brilliant comedy, brilliantly conceived, brilliantly written, brilliantly produced and brilliantly acted. And, while the word "brilliant" is being tossed about, let me place it quite convincingly before the setting designed by Stewart Chaney, which is the only bedroom, livingroom and kitchen setting I have ever seen that looks—and behaves—like a bedroom, livingroom and kitchen.

As for the actors, Margaret Sullavan is wistful, humorous and just plain superb as the girl who wins her soldier; Audrey Christie, as the girl who loses her soldier, not only motivates the entire comedy but, for the last time, most certainly deserves her likeness on the program; and Elliott Nugent, as the soldier Margaret wins and Audrey loses, is not only a soldier in a uniform, but a soldier with these, them and those to activate him.

"The Voice of the Turtle" is this season's foremost comedy. I doubt if it will be equaled before the real voice of the real turtle is heard in the land. It's charming, yes. But it's brilliant also.

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***December 9, 1943***

## *Enchanting!*

**By HOWARD BARNES**

JOHN VAN DRUTEN'S new play is cause for rejoicing. In "The Voice of the Turtle" he has written a romantic comedy that is at once witty, tender and wise. It has depth and mobility as well as high and unfaltering humor. Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and Audrey Christie play the three characters of the piece to perfection. It has been given an impeccable production by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., with an unpretentiously tricky setting by Stewart Chaney. Since van Druten has staged it artfully and honestly, this Morosco Theater offering is an irresistible delight.

The presence of Miss Sullavan in the theater again, after a long term in the screen studios is, in itself, reason for jubilation. She is a fortunate young lady, though, in having had so substantial and amusing a bit of make-believe for her return to the stage. The comedy is there, rich, sometimes ribald, occasionally touching behind all the fine acting in "The Voice of the Turtle." The author has not only fashioned a gay and enchanting work, he has called the turn on those pessimists who have insisted that we might expect no fine new plays for the duration.

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Craftsmanship was to have been expected from van Druten. He has conceived engaging characters and has given them the talk and bits of business that make a stage come very much alive. In addition, he has given a random encounter of an aspiring actress and a forlorn sergeant the touch of compassion and understanding that is the core of all good comedy. There are moments when the production vaguely threatens to become a bedroom farce, but van Druten appears to have liked his people too much to take shortcuts. Instead, he has resolved a gay and rather reckless week-end with a real nod to the Song of Solomon from which he took his title.

However perceptive and amusing the writing, "The Voice of the Turtle" needed plenty of performing. It has it. Miss Sullavan has lost none of her acting skill while facing the cameras. She brings naivete and radiance to the part of the lonely actress, trying to forget an unhappy love affair. With her throaty, eloquent voice, she makes the character full of song as well as laughter. Nugent, who is stood up by her pal on a three-day leave to find his predicament very delightful, is right in there with her when it comes to honors. Their hesitant love-making, interrupted by such hilarious incidents as his extricating her from zipper trouble with a pair of pliers is always right, always entrancing.

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Miss Christie has a lesser role, but she plays the tramp friend of the heroine, who gives a soldier the go-by only to regret it, with just the proper raucous emphasis. Perhaps the whole key to "The Voice of the Turtle" is the consummate restraint with which it has been written and performed. Laughter kindles immediately at the Morosco. It needs no underlining. Neither does the basis of solid, honest human drama which makes the play one of the most satisfying comedies we have been privileged to see in longer than I like to remember.

# "The Voice of the Turtle"

**NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM**
***December 9, 1943***

## *Van Druten's Latest Play Has Premiere*

**By ALTON COOK**

ADMIRERS of John Van Druten's plays are a cult, and its members usually feel pity more than anything else for the unfortunates unable to share their enthusiasm. Before I go any further in this review of the latest Van Druten play, The Voice of the Turtle, we had better make it clear that I never have been able to join the good circle. If you happen to be in I can understand exactly the disdain with which you are reading this review.

The Voice of the Turtle is excellent Van Druten and there is not the slightest doubt that it will keep the Morosco Theater comfortably full of contented circle members for months. This play has all the Van Druten polish, the highly civilized dialogue, the gentle whimsy and the people in whom endless self-analysis amounts to a complex. It has also the Van Druten paucity of event that has excluded people like myself from joining the admirers.

### Three in Cast

There are just three persons in the cast and they sit and talk about the weather, their friends, their past, their hopes—anything at all that would be likely to come up in conversation among people intensely interested in themselves and almost as much so in one another. There were times when I thought it might have been pleasanter if I could have talked to the good friend in the seat alongside me about some of my own past and hopes. But, remember, I am not a member of the Van Druten gang, and you people who are will have no such thoughts. The Van Druten gang has the greatest listeners in the world when it's Van Druten characters who are doing the talking.

I envied the people who were having so much hearty merriment over such remarks as, "I should never have thought of curling up on a couch with potato salad." I wish I could follow them also in their delighted laughter when Margaret Sullavan dropped everything a couple of times and simply made the beds. It was the manner of bedmaking that Van Druten had instructed which makes it utterly charming or just bedmaking, depending on whether you are in the cult.

### Talk and Talk and Talk

The play starts off with a couple of girls (Miss Sullavan and Audrey Christie) sitting and talking about their sex life. One of the girls stands up a soldier swain (Elliott Nugent) and departs, leaving him on the hands of Miss Sullavan. So these two sit and talk for two acts, never pausing until they have fallen in love.

Next day there is some windy argument about whether they really should allow themselves to be in love and Miss Christie returns resentful that her stood-up beau hadn't spent his time sitting and pining. Nothing happens that Van Druten dialogue cannot straighten out at length great enough to keep the cult happy.

Plays as uneventful as this depend heavily on acting and staging. In all details of those matters everything has been done flawlessly to help The Voice of the Turtle. Margaret Sullavan plays with an elfin grace and caprice, Elliott Nugent is a gentle soul, frightened of life's bitter hazards but willing to chance them for a girl like this. The third character is a genial trollop, written on more rugged lines and played in excellent spirit by Audrey Christie.

Van Druten's direction is artful enough to impress any of us cultist or not. An ingeniously and tastefully contrived set puts all three rooms of an apartment on the stage at one time.

This world is full of two kinds of people—the Van Drutenists and the others. You had better be good and sure of which kind you are before visiting The Voice of the Turtle. This play can transport you into ecstatic happiness or subject you to some pretty good stretches of boredom.

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**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
***December 9, 1943***

## *Mr. van Druten Goes to Town*

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

THE Morosco has just been redecorated and made to look clean as a whistle, but probably by the time *The Voice of the Turtle* has finished its run, the Morosco will need to be redecorated again. For Mr. van Druten has written the best light comedy of his career, as winningly gay in spirit as it is superlatively adroit in craftsmanship; and what goes for the play goes equally for the production. Mr. van Druten has staged it with great finesse; Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and Audrey Christie—they are the entire cast — have acted it with great spirit and naturalness; while Stewart Chaney's set—a cross-section of a three-room New York apartment—might, all by itself, almost carry the day for a merely passable comedy. Here it is in the nature of an extra dividend.

To write a thoroughly successful three-character comedy is probably a little harder than finding a four-leaf clover in the grass on a dark night; but *The Voice of the Turtle* ripples along with the greatest ease. What is more, for a solid hour and a half it becomes a two-character play, with Miss Sullavan and Mr. Nugent working together without a hitch. Theirs is a simple enough story—of a sergeant who comes to town for the weekend, is stood up by his date, and spends the weekend instead (with increasingly romantic emotions) with a very young actress. Both the actress and the soldier have been hurt by love and on their guard against it; but Bill is not afraid of it when it comes, and Sally is. For Bill is mature and Sally, though desperately trying to be, is not—Sally is essentially starry-eyed, and a little gauche, and given to dramatizing herself. Bill's double conquest of Sally —first of having her give herself to him, and then of having her give herself to love—is achieved in a light-comedy atmosphere that steers clear of sentimentality.

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Mr. van Druten has very deftly managed to be leisurely without being monotonous, and to give his dialogue sprightliness and humor without descending to gags. The dialogue, indeed, is reinforced by all kinds of skilful "business." The phone, the last refuge of the harassed comedy-writer, becomes for once an honest source of amusement; while the kitchen, usually the abode of bit-part maids, becomes a legitimate source of gaiety.

Miss Sullavan is at her best in *The Voice of the Turtle* — youthful, nimble, attractive and scrumptiously dressed; while Mr. Nugent, playing with that down-to-earth naturalness that makes him seem hardly an actor, gives a perfect performance. As the lady who stands him up, Miss Christie is admirably brisk and breezy, and a diverting intrusion on the romance.

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**NEW YORK POST**
***December 9, 1943***

## *John van Druten's Latest: "The Voice of the Turtle"*

**By WILELLA WALDORF**

JOHN VAN DRUTEN, who once wrote an attractive English comedy with only four characters entitled "There's Always Juliet," has now written an equally attractive American comedy with only three characters, "The Voice of the Turtle," impeccably produced by Alfred de Liagre Jr., last night at the brightly refurbished Morosco Theatre.

There is nothing particularly startling nor significant about "The Voice of the Turtle," which tells the by now familiar story of Bill, a soldier on leave who is stood up by a girl named Olive and entertained instead by her friend Sally.

Mr. van Druten, however, has a facility for touching up a plot that, in its essentials, is apparent from the first, and for keeping audiences as interested in what goes on as if they had never seen it happen before.

He is considerably aided in this process by the performances of Margaret Sullavan and Elliott Nugent, who are so well cast in the two principal roles that what might otherwise have seemed a little cheap on occasion becomes instead merely a charming interlude in the lives of an actress and a soldier.

### Theatre People

Mr. van Druten is fond of the theatre and some of the most amusing passages in his plays are apt to concern stage people. In this instance, both Sally and Olive are actresses.

Sally is a beginner who has so far appeared in nothing but flops, but she is about to start rehearsals in something that will give her a chance at last. Olive, a breezier type, gets around more, and generally enjoys longer runs, even if some of them are on the road. In the course of the play she indignantly turns down a chance to go on tour in "Tobacco Road."

Audrey Christie plays Olive in her usual easy style, without ever overdoing it. Miss Christie has had giddier parts equipped with more dazzling repartee, but she brightens "The Voice of the Turtle" on her two visits to Sally's flat. Except for those timely interruptions, however, Mr. van Druten's comedy is a two-character piece. It is a tribute to the deftness of his writing and direction when we say that we were reminded of this technical matter only once or twice in the second act when he seemed to have Miss Sullavan prowling around a bit too hectically when it might have been less distracting to permit her, for a change, simply to sit down and talk.

The problem of keeping a two-character play moving does not necessarily demand that its characters be always on the move. Generally, however, "The Voice of the Turtle" is very pleasant stuff both to watch and to listen to, and Stewart Chaney's realistic setting showing Sally's living room, bedroom and kitchen, complete with a stove that cooks and an ice-box that makes real ice cubes, helps to make things nice and homey.

Miss Sullavan, who has had a career both in the theatre and on the screen and happens to be, besides, the mother of three children, is so slim and youthful looking that she has no trouble at all in creating the illusion that she is just past twenty and an eager young Broadwayite not long out of Joplin, Mo. She has one or two vocal mannerisms, including a tendency to let her speeches fade out toward the end, that threaten to develop into something rather alarming, but she is a perfect choice for the part.

Mr. Nugent, as usual, is completely at ease in his role, getting everything out of his lines, yet never playing to the gallery for laughs. An old farceur, he has a fine sense of timing and a feeling for good taste that should quite disarm any squeamish members of the audience who may be inclined to feel a trifle shocked by the frankly sexy theme of the play.

It's a comedy that will get a number of horse-laughs—there was a good deal of braying going on from time to time last night—but the author and his actors never permit the proceedings to become merely cheap.

Mr. van Druten has written passages in other plays that we found more original and more scintillating than anything in this new work, but we shall be surprised, what with one thing and another, if he hasn't turned out the biggest hit of his career in "The Voice of the Turtle."

# "The Voice of the Turtle"

*December 9, 1943*
**THE NEW YORK SUN**

## *'The Voice of the Turtle,' New Van Druten Comedy, a Hit at the Morosco*

**By HERRICK BROWN**

ONCE in a blue moon a playgoer has the rare treat of running across a perfect play perfectly acted and those first nighters fortunate enough to have been present as Alfred de Liagre Jr. set John Van Druten's new comedy, "The Voice of the Turtle," down on the stage of the Morosco Theater last evening will readily testify that the moon riding high above the clouds hanging over 45th street must have had an azure hue.

Gay, clever and with a charming love story to tell, Mr. van Druten's play is enchanting entertainment from first to last. The performance matches the script in excellence. It's hard to imagine any player giving life to comedy more superbly than do Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and Audrey Christie. It has been a long, long time since Miss Sullavan brightened the Broadway area in "Stage Door" and then departed for Hollywood. Now it looks as if the Pacific Coast and the film studios will be doing the waiting and it's sure to be lengthy.

Mr. van Druten, who has a flair for spinning his stage stories with a minimum of characters, limits himself this time to three. Of the trio, two hold the stage alone for one whole act—the second—and for the major part of the others too. Yet so skillfully does Mr. van Druten unwind his plot, so bright and fresh is his dialogue, so amusing and so human are the situations he evolves, so adult is his viewpoint, that the interest never flags, nor is laughter long absent. Fundamentally "The Voice of the Turtle" may be only a retelling of boy meets girl, but through the magic of Mr. van Druten's writing and the artistry of the acting under his deft direction it becomes a sparkling bit of top flight theater.

The playwright has Sergt. Bill Page, Pittsburgh-born and Princeton-educated, meet Sally Middleton a struggling young actress from Joplin, Mo., through Olive Lashbrooke, a friend of Sally's who is also on the stage. While seeking a better part than has yet been her lot, Sally is momentarily splurging herself with an apartment in Manhattan's East Sixties, and it is there Olive has Bill call for her when he arrivees from camp for the week end. He's all dated up with Olive, whom he's known for several years, when the unexpected arrival in New York of an old flame of hers—quite the old flame, as far as she's concerned—throws his plans all awry. After trying vainly to find a substitute in a succession of calls over Sally's telephone—and there's a scene to set an audience chuckling—he stops for an extra drink and a chat with the young actress and ends up by taking her out to dinner.

You can easily guess the outline of the rest. He stays for the week end, of course. You'll have to visit the Morosco, however, to discover just how much fun Mr. van Druten has in store for his audiences as Bill, practical, frank, and very likeable, and Sally, a charming combination of Mid-West domesticity and metropolitan casualness, join forces, and you'll want to see for yourself too with what an understanding touch he develops their romance of springtime, when "the voice of the turtle is heard in the land." (Bill, quoting the Songs of Solomon, takes time to point out of course that what really is meant is a turtledove.)

The playwright hands his stars a terrific assignment when he places the responsibility of carrying virtually an entire play on their shoulders, and they meet the test triumphantly. Miss Sullavan could not have chosen a happier part in which to visit Manhattan. Throughout she brings to the role of Sally, warmth and humor and charm in abundance. The playwright has given her a host of excellent lines to speak and she makes the most of all of them. The way she quotes his fabulous and mythical Madame Pushkin, trainer of young actresses, is something not to be missed.

Elliott Nugent has done much over the years to make Broadway a pleasant place to be, but he's never had a better role, nor played one in finer style than he does Bill. His slow speech, with the amusing pauses, his calmness and his complete sincerity are exactly what the part calls for. And when in the final act, the play turns momentarily serious and he makes his plea to Sally for their love, he achieves an excellent a bit of playing as the town affords.

With less to do than the others in the role of Olive, who is always out for the best time possible, Audrey Christie comes in for her share of the acting honors. In her capable hands Olive becomes just the shrewd, worldly wise and brassy actress that the playwright obviously ordered. He gives her a marvelous exit line near the end, and she does not let him down there, or anywhere else.

Stewart Chaney has devised a setting for Sally's apartment that is as attractive as it is ingenious. He shows a cross section of three rooms, living room, bedroom and kitchenette, and Mr. van Druten gets the most out of the chance for simultaneous action the set makes possible.

If you are among those who have been worrying because the season hadn't brought forth a real comedy hit, you can stop fretting at once. Your problem now is to get in at the Morosco.

# "The World's Full of Girls"

**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
*December 7, 1943*

## *Almost But Not Quite*

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

I WISH I could report that *The World's Full of Girls* is a successful play, for it is full of pleasant things, touched with both a likeable humor and a feeling for people, and free from the shoddiness that too often creeps into plays that *are* successful. But Nunnally Johnson, perhaps because he was faced with the always difficult job of dramatizing a novel, has somehow found neither a consistent tone nor a proper unity for his story. I have not read *Till I Come Back to You*, the novel from which this play was adapted, but very likely it enjoyed richer treatment and fuller integration.

In one sense—in the sense that would give it the most meaning—*The World's Full of Girls* is a cross-section of very average people, people with limited horizons and limited minds, in relation to their time. (Their time is the Autumn of 1942). This would allow for great fluidity of treatment, in what may be facilely called the Chekhovian manner. But Mr. Johnson has none of Chekhov's feeling for tone or for dramatic suggestion, and teeters between simple naturalism and domestic comedy. Equally he shuttles between painting a family picture and telling an extraneous love story.

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In terms of portraiture, Mr. Johnson's Brooklyn family—the painfully average old people, their harassed daughter married to a moron, their floozy-ish single daughter who is carrying on with a young fascist—have their points. They have their comic points and their realistic ones; and in their unawareness of what is going on in the world, even the most harmless of them can be disquieting. But they are allowed no significant development, either dramatic or psychological. Even when they briefly explode into action, it is on an almost farcical plane of sisterly hair-pulling.

The counterpoised love story—of a young friend of the family who has joined the Marines and becomes reunited with the girl he loves—offers a pleasant bit of plot, but does not add up to anything. Indeed, it subtracts from the play, by shutting off the family after the second act.

Mr. Johnson has not found the thing that would tie his play together; least of all has he found it by here and there introducing, rather editorially, a serious speech. Much of his dialogue is nice, some of his scenes are taking;—but his play as a whole is too diffuse and under-developed. It might better have been called—for it somehow comes down to —*The World's Full of People.*

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Mr. Harris' direction is spirited and expert, and there are some very good performances. Berry Kroeger is not entirely right as the Marine, but Virginia Gilmore is very effective as his girl. So is Harry Bellaver as a Guadalcanal hero, and Charles Lang is fine as the young fascist. There are good performances too by Julie Stevens, Eva Condon, Thomas W. Ross and others.

**NEW YORK TIMES**
*December 7, 1943*

## THE PLAY IN REVIEW
## *"The World's Full of Girls"*

**By LEWIS NICHOLS**

IN "The World's Full of Girls," Nunnally Johnson has written a play which is curiously disappointing. It is so because it has several good passages and some nice characters—enough of each that the audience sits hopefully anxious that the whole succeed. But at the end, and despite Jed Harris's usual professional direction and good playing, there remains the feeling that as a visit to the theatre, the evening at the Royale has not been completely successful.

Mr. Johnson based his play on the Thomas Bell novel, "Till I Come Back to You," authorities on the book saying that it is a reasonably exact transcription. But up on the stage, what should be one play becomes two plays, neither getting time for a full treatment. Basically, the story is about a young mechanic who has just joined the Marines and the girl with whom he has quarreled but meets again on his last day of civilian life. But the drama also tells of a Brooklyn family not unlike—Mr. Johnson will get tired of this—the whacky outfit of "You Can't Take It With You." The family cuts into what could be a tender love story; that story cuts into what could be a rowdy comedy. Neither wins.

The story is of Miley, who joins the Marines and on his final day goes to Brooklyn to see the family with whom he had lived. The father wants to buy a farm; one of the daughters has married a man who can't hold a job; another wants to marry one of Brooklyn's younger fascists. One of the daughters calls the girl, who comes over and meets Miley again, quarrels and leaves and finally visits his apartment that night. Some members of the Bridges household definitely are worth knowing—both father and mother and also the son-in-law who is not bright—and some of their conversation is worth hearing. But unfortunately not all.

In directing, Mr. Harris has brought some speed to those places where the Bridges, in their bickerings, are the most harried, and a pleasant quality of affection to one or two of the love passages. Berry Kroeger plays Miley and Virginia Gilmore is the girl. In the family of the Bridges there are Thomas W. Ross, who is excellent as a somewhat vague, elderly man who keeps wanting to retire to his farm; and Eve Condon as his helpmate. Thomas Hume, Julie Stevens, Frances Heflin and Walter Burke also are of Brooklyn; and Harry Bellaver excellently plays a small role as a marine recruiting sergeant who had been wounded in the Pacific. The cast also boasts a real baby—Mr. Hume's. If later she goes on the stage, it is too bad the records will not be able to show she was carried on for her first part in a better play.

# "The World's Full of Girls"

**NEW YORK SUN**
***December 7, 1943***

## 'The World's Full of Girls' Presented by Jed Harris at the Royale

**By HERRICK BROWN**

JED HARRIS belatedly opened his season at the Royale Theater last evening with Nunnally Johnson's "The World's Full of Girls." He needn't have bothered. In fact, after spending two hours watching "The World's Full of Girls" slowly unfold, we find it a little hard to imagine why he did.

The program indicates that Mr. Johnson's play has its inspiration in a novel by Thomas Bell. "Till I Come Back to You" is the book's title, and as fiction it is credited with a following. It may be that there is a play of sorts in Mr. Bell's tale of an enlisted Marine's last day as a civilian, but if that is true—and after last night's demonstration at the Royale it seems highly doubtful—Mr. Johnson most certainly hasn't succeeded in locating it. Between the covers of a book the garrulous and quarrelsome Bridges of Flatbush may have borne some slight resemblance to the gay and fantastic Sycamores of "You Can't Take It With You," and thus have tempted Mr. Harris. As they emerge under his direction on the stage of the Royale, however, they are merely a tiresome and sordid and thoroughly obnoxious crew.

Papa Bridges, longing for a farm up Kingston way and futilely trying to find out what a buttery is, is the best of the lot, and even he is pathetic rather than amusing. And certainly his blatant and smart-alecky son Dave and his shallow daughter Flossie, who has been seduced by as objectionable a young draft dodger as any youthful actor could be called upon to portray, are anything but hilarious folk to meet. In fact, after two acts of the family's brawling and wisecracking, it's relief to find most of them still in Brooklyn as the final act shifts to Greenwich Village. Furthermore, it's a mystery why Miley, the hero, ever wanted to drop over to say goodbye to them before being inducted into the Marines. It is also painfully obvious why daughter Adele's baby would never smile.

Throughout, Mr. Johnson can't seem to make up his mind whether he's telling the Bridges' story or Miley's. At least, it's Miley's romance with Sally, another friend of the Bridges, that is the source of what slight suspense there is in this talky and static contraption which is more a string of episodes, most of them unpleasant, and a few clever lines, than a well-rounded play.

Thomas W. Ross, fine actor that he is, manages to make something believable out of Papa Bridges, and Berry Kroeger and Virginia Gilmore, who seems fated to portray a young girl encountering love out of wedlock, afford some refreshing moments as Miley and Sally. It falls to Harry Bellaver, however, to draw the evening's most sincere applause when as a Marine sergeant he haltingly and dramatically tells how a Jap bit off two fingers at Guadalcanal. As for the other players, they worked hard all the long evening. Even before the audience began to melt away prematurely, however, it seemed clear that they'd be glad to forget all about "The World's Full of Girls." In that they had plenty of company on the house side of the footlights.

**'THE WORLD'S FULL OF GIRLS'**

A play by Nunnally Johnson. Based on a novel by Thomas Bell. Presented at the Royale Theater December 6, 1943, by Jed Harris. Staged by Mr. Harris. Settings by Stewart Chaney. The cast:

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| Mr. Bridges | Thomas W. Ross |
| Mrs. Bridges | Eva Condon |
| Dave | Thomas Hume |
| Hannah | Julie Stevens |
| Florrie | Gloria Hallward |
| Adele | Frances Heflin |
| Nick | Walter Burke |
| Edward | Charles Lang |
| Miley | Berry Kroeger |
| Sally | Virginia Gilmore |
| Sergt. Snyder | Harry Bellaver |
| Mel Fletcher | John Conway |
| Mrs. Fletcher | Cora Smith |

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## 'The World's Full of Girls' But It Still Could Use Some New Plays

**By JOHN CHAPMAN**

"THE World's Full of Girls," says the title of the Nunnally Johnson play which Jed Harris presented at the Royale last night. The world is also full of people, and people make "characters" for playwrights. But the world is not nearly full enough of plays, and last night's disappointment failed to ease the shortage.

From Thomas Bell's novel, "Till I Come Back to You," Mr. Johnson has taken a number of everyday people, and with writing skill and a good ear for human talk has made them all seem real enough. But nothing much happens to any of them, and what little does happen seems to make no difference one way or another.

It is, I hasten to add, nothing to get sore about. It is well cast and well directed by Mr. Harris, and there are moments of deep interest in it—like the time the marine sergeant drops in on the Brooklyn family and quietly, almost inarticulately, tells how a Jap bit off two of his fingers in a foxhole on Guadalcanal. This is splendid, terse writing, and it is matched by the economical playing of Harry Bellaver. But it's just a bit in the play—just a moment.

### One of Those Households

Most of what happens takes place in a Brooklyn household which is too full of relatives, many of whom are unpleasant. There are Pa and Ma Bridges, who are comfortable enough and comfortably played by Thomas W. Ross and Eva Condon. Then there are sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law and even a real live baby. The baby is quite a help because he keeps his mouth shut.

The time is last Fall, so between ordinary family bickerings and the ordinary worries of Brooklyn life there is some talk of the war, of the draft and of defense jobs. The girl with the baby is married to a dope who can't even pass a factory IQ test. The girl who isn't married is a floozy who entertains a draft-dodging, loud-talking Fascist anti-Semite in her room.

Into this layout comes Miley, a nice guy, to say goodbye because he has joined the marines. Also into it comes his old girl, with whom he's had a bustup. Before the play is over boy and girl have patched it up and she is obligingly spending the night with him because he's taking the train from Penn Station in the morning.

### Best Moments are Moments

The nice guy and the old girl are all right, I guess, and intelligently played by Berry Kroeger and Virginia Gilmore—but I couldn't worry much about either of them. The best parts of "The World's Full of Girls" are its unrelated moments, like the marine recruiting sergeant from Guadalcanal happening in.

And like, particularly, the last act scene in which Miley, war-bound in the morning, cleans out his Greenwich Village room. He gives away some stuff and sells some of it to a young couple who have nothing to do with the plot but who are interesting. The husband is a mild, myonic little worrier who is about to become a post-Pearl Harbor father. He thinks the draft may not get him on account of his eyes. But, he thinks on the other hand, maybe the army will create a near-sighted division for hand-to-hand combat.

The young couple are played by John Conway and Cora Smith. Gloria Hallward is a flamboyant and amusing floozy, and Julie Stevens, Frances Heflin, Walter Burke and the rest are as helpful as they can be.

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## Below Par

**By HOWARD BARNES**

WHILE writing some of the best movie scripts that reach the screen, Nunnally Johnson has found time to dash off a play. He must have been in something of a hurry with "The World's Full of Girls." This Jed Harris production at the Royale has some snatches of tough characterization. It has the sort of trenchant talk that makes one feel almost like an eavesdropper. Unfortunately, the piece has no more dramatic contour than a radio soap opera. Since Harris in his staging has done little to pull the work together, it is considerably less than theatrically satisfying.

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The whole project may have been ill-advised from the start. The author has taken a novel by Thomas Bell, "Till I Come Back to You," and tried to shape it to stage terms. It would appear to be a literal job of translation, preserving the vigor and realism of original literary passages without transmuting them to the peculiar demands of another medium. The Brooklyn family which dominates the stage of the Royale for two acts is disagreeably fascinating. The last day in civilian clothes of a right-thinking youngster who has enlisted in the marines has all sorts of dramatic potentialities. Not much of a play emerges from a hodge-podge of episodes and violently contrasting moods.

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For most of the time the action splutters like a defective Roman candle. There is a grim Sunday dinner which makes one hopeful that "The World's Full of Girls" will be the reverse side of the Hardy and Aldrich family medal. Instead, the Bridges clan gradually drops out of the dramatic frame, leaving a boy and girl seizing a bit of romantic happiness as he is about to put on a uniform. A good interlude finds a veteran of Guadalcanal describing how a Jap bit off his fingers. There is a unrelated burst of Fascist anti-Semitism and a conventional bit of double-crossing on the part of a scheming wench which wins her a wedding ring. These bursts of theatrical excitement are far too random to make an absorbing show.

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The players are willing and sometimes highly persuasive, but they have had scant help from the Johnson plotting. Virginia Gilmore, as the discarded girl of the would-be marine, who gives in to him on the eve of his departure, brings sympathy and feeling to the part. Berry Kroeger, as the lad who enlists, makes the most of the most consecutive role in the drama; Harry Bellaver has a good bit as the marine veteran and Gloria Hallward conceives a particularly dreadful portrait of a slut. Too much of the time they are on stage, waiting for something new to happen. Far too little of dramatic significance does happen in "The World's Full of Girls." It seems unlikely to me that it would even make a good picture.